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Blanchette: Meet Mr. Awesome

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Spokesman-Review sports columnist
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Cam F. Awesome? Really?

"There are no others," said Cam F. Awesome.

Surely not.

"And why hide it from someone until they get to know me and learn how awesome I am?" he reasoned. "Now, as soon as they see my name, they know."

And that's the thing about Cam F. Awesome. He is thoughtful. He is helpful. He will hold open the door for you.

OK, maybe it's the door that leads directly to Cam F. Awesome's world. But who holds the door, any door, open at all these days?

Cam F. Awesome. The name screams arrogance, but the attitude exudes embrace.

He wants everyone to eat healthier. He wants to eradicate cancer. He wants you to approach all aspects of life with the same confidence he possesses. He doesn't want you as a friend, he wants you as family.

"They say you can't choose your family, but I disagree," he said. "There doesn't have to be anything wrong with your family to choose more family. I'd rather have family than friends. That way, I can trust somebody all the way."

Who is Cam F. Awesome?

He is the 24-year-old super-heavyweight straw that stirs the 2013 USA Boxing National Championships, which heads into the final two days of its week-long run here today. On Thursday, he stepped into the ring – in pink, including a cape, to highlight his cancer work – and stopped Ryan Watson of Duluth, Minn., on a third-round TKO in the elite division, which he's planning on winning for the third time.

He is the Meat-Free Athlete of the Month, as selected by some well-meaners who want to scare you off bacon burgers and Buffalo wings. He is full-on vegan, not the usual diet discipline of 220-pound punchers. You could imagine him fighting under the nickname the "Vicious Vegan," but why would someone named Cam F. Awesome possibly need a nickname?

He is a one-time 270-pound butterball who took up boxing at 18 "because girls don't like fat guys. Now they say, 'Oh, look at that guy holding the kale. He's really hot.'"

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He is the former Lenroy Thompson, who would rather that name not be used in this forum or any other because he hasn't been that since Feb. 16, his "half-birthday."

"So I have two birthdays now," he said. "Actually, I think I'll have a birthday every three months. Why wouldn't you? It's like the opposite of being born on Feb. 29."

So what is this? An identity crisis?

Not exactly.

"It's too hard to build a legacy off the name Thompson," he said. "There's too many of them. If I'm going to leave a legacy after I die – if I die, and I don't think I will – you'll be able to look back and know who started the whole Awesome thing."

And his family's reaction?

"They're probably not the happiest in the world," he said. "But they're a bunch of Thompsons."

But there was a second agenda. As a Thompson, he won the U.S. Olympic Trials in 2011 for a trip to London, until he got sideways with the folks at the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency. He says he failed to inform them he'd be out of the country in competition when they showed up at his door to take a random test, and they made an example of him. They say he missed three testing dates. In any case, he owns up that it was "my fault, completely" that he was suspended for a year, unable to bring himself to watch the Games.

But he didn't go completely underground. He played roller hockey and kickball in Kansas City rec leagues. And he tried stand-up comedy.

"In boxing, if you lose you can say, 'It's not really my night,' " he said. "But if they don't like your comedy, they don't like you. If you bomb, the boos hurt a lot worse than punches."

But the biggest part of his remake is his body. It was a year ago that 44-year-old Bill Mackey walked into his gym, looking to learn the sport and drop some weight. The diet he described was dismissed as "crazy" by his new trainer, until Mackey went from 225 pounds to 175 in a few months.


So the fighter took on the Engine2Diet challenge and in 28 days dropped 32 pounds, eventually reaching 197 before building himself back up again. Mackey and his wife, Ami, accompanied him to Spokane, and are whipping up pancakes and pastas to fuel his championship mission as the plant-based boxer.

Not that he didn't have championship stuff before. With Golden Gloves and other events, he has eight national titles to his name. Well, names.

"I told myself when I first walked into the gym at 18, 'There's something special about that kid,' " he said. "I don't know if anybody agreed. But I would say I was amazing from the first day."

But now he's awesome.

Cam F. Awesome.

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